

iPad app revolutionising therapy for autistic children

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Australian researchers have harnessed tablet technology to develop an iPad app that is set to revolutionise the way parents around the world provide in-home therapy for their autistic children.

Named the [TOBY Playpad](#) ([Therapy](#) Outcomes by You), the app enables parents to provide [early intervention](#) therapy for their children as soon as an [autism spectrum disorder](#) has been diagnosed.

"Starting therapy as soon as possible after [diagnosis](#) is critical to the long-term development of [autistic children](#). However, many families face waiting lists of up to a year before getting their children into an intervention program. This where the TOBY Playpad can step in," explained Deakin University's Professor Svetha Venkatesh who led the technology development team in collaboration with Autism West Support Inc (a Western Australian Autism support charity) and a group of WA families.

"The TOBY Playpad app acts as a 'wait-list program' that parents can use to provide early intervention therapy for their children during the crucial window of opportunity between diagnosis and more formalised programs with a trained therapist," Professor Venkatesh said.

"The app is not a replacement for one-on-one therapy; rather it provides a cost-effective and proven program that parents can easily use with their children at home."

Professor Venkatesh, who heads Deakin's [Pattern Recognition](#) and Data Analytics research centre, said the iPad app turned tedious and time-consuming activities, such as making and using [flash cards](#), into fun and stimulating experiences for the children and their parents.

"With one in 90 children world-wide suffering with autism, many families are struggling with the challenges of providing much needed therapy for their autistic children," she said.

"The TOBY Playpad is a rigorous learning framework that has been well tested with autistic children, their parents and therapists.

"It delivers flexible lessons using a rich collection of [multimedia content](#). And because the app monitors a child's interactions at an unprecedented level, it is able to adapt lessons to the child's performance, and automatically deliver detailed reports for review by parents and therapists.

"What is also unique about the TOBY Playpad is the range of 'off-[iPad](#)' natural environmental tasks to extend the therapy beyond the touch-pad interface."

As well providing much needed support for parents and increasing the learning outcomes for autistic children, the TOBY Playpad could result in considerable cost savings for families and the wider community, Professor Venkatesh said.

"At a cost of \$100, the TOBY Playpad is a fraction of what families pay for therapy," she said.

"It is also estimated that the societal costs over the life span of one autistic child is \$3.2 million. This cost could be reduced by as much as 65 per cent if appropriate early intervention is applied. We believe

TOBY Playpad can play a considerable role in reducing the costs to families and the community."

The TOBY Playpad is available through the Apple iTunes Store and is currently targeted at children aged two to six years old. Development of the app has been funded by the Federal Government, through an Australian Research Council Linkage grant, and Autism West. For more information about the TOBY Playpad go to tobyplaypad.com/

Provided by Deakin University

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